

TENNESSEE HEALTHY YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT PRIORITIES

Traditionally, adolescents in America lack a voice in determining the degree to which there is investment in their positive development. This age group has limited political power since most youth are not eligible to vote. Adolescents are further marginalized because they represent a small proportion of the total population, have higher rates of poverty, and are more ethnically diverse than the population as a whole. Therefore, adolescents need advocates.

Adults need to recognize the contributions of young people as volunteers, in the workplace, in the community and in the culture at large. American's perceptions of youth must change so that adults respond to both the contributions and the challenges presented by young people today.

The ten critical tasks to improve adolescent and young adult health in Tennessee include steps that can be taken by individuals, families, schools, local government, the private and non-profit sectors, faith-based organizations, policymakers, and young people themselves.

The Vision

The vision of the Tennessee Initiative to Improve Adolescent and Young Adult Health by 2010 is to develop and strengthen partnerships at all levels of society that promote the health and well-being of Tennessee's youth. Particular emphasis should be on addressing health disparities, positive youth development, prevention, risk reduction and early intervention.

Ten Action Steps

1. *Ensure Access to Mental Health Services:* Assure availability of services for early identification and intervention with at-risk adolescents.
2. *Support Parents in Effective Parenting of Adolescent Children:* Help families to reach their potential as irreplaceable positive influences in the lives of teens.
3. *Develop dedicated funding for adolescent health:* In order to adequately address the multiple needs of "at risk" adolescents and young adults, dedicated funding for adolescent health should be established.
4. *Address health disparities among adolescents and young adults with a focus on gender issues:* Male adolescents and young adults often report higher degrees of risk-taking than females. However, few policies and programs are designed to meet young men's unique needs.
5. *Ensure/Improve access to health services with an emphasis on promoting Tennessee's confidentiality laws:* Assure the availability of health services for "at-risk" adolescents and young adults. Also, address confidentiality issues since the most common reason adolescents do not access preventive health care is confidentiality concerns.
6. *Maintain reproductive health as a priority:* Focus on reducing teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents and young adults.
7. *Build/strengthen partnerships outside of public health:* Partner with all sectors of society to address adolescent and young adult health issues.
8. *Develop a uniform statewide data collection system that would provide county specific data:* Uniform data is needed by county as well as by region and state levels to determine program priorities and resource allocation.
9. *Build public support for investment in youth:* A great deal is known about how to address the opportunities for positive youth development and to reduce the potential for adverse consequences of adolescent risk-taking. Adequate long-term investment will always be required, and the voting public must see the purpose and value of investing its scarce resources.
10. *Involve Youth in Policy Formation and Program Implementation:* Use teens' firsthand knowledge of school, peer and community environments in forming policies that impact youth.



How to Begin

No matter where you live, work or play there is always an opportunity to support young people and their parents or caregivers. In short, it makes no difference where Tennesseans begin implementing these recommendations, as long as they **take action**. Tennessee's Initiative to Improve Adolescent and Young Adult Health by 2010 extends its support and encouragement to communities as they work to foster the health and well-being of their young people.

Web Sites

Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org

Center for Adolescent Health and Development
www.allaboutkids.umn.edu/cfahad

Child Trends
www.childtrends.org

Community Toolbox
<http://ctb.ku.edu/>

Forum on Adolescence, National Research Council and
Institute of Medicine
www.nas.edu/nrc

Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health Promotion and
Disease Prevention
www.jhsph.edu/hao/cah

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

National Adolescent Health Information Center
<http://nahic.ucsf.edu/>

National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/NationalInitiative/index.htm>

Search Institute
www.search-institute.org

